Toward a Federally-Endorsed Chinook Salmon Recovery Plan

Commitments of the Green/Duwamish and Central Puget Sound Watershed (Water Resource Inventory Area 9, including portions of WRIAs 8, 10, and 15)/Response to the December 18, 2003 Letter from Bill Ruckelshaus for the Puget Sound Shared Strategy Development Committee

June 30, 2004

a. What will it take to achieve the planning targets or properly functioning conditions for independent spawning salmon populations, including the protection of existing habitat functions and restoration? In areas without independent spawning populations, what will it take to protect existing functions and where are there good opportunities for enhancement and restoration?

Strategic Assessment

Our strategy for recovery planning, like that of the Puget Sound Technical Recovery Team and Shared Strategy, is based on the concept of a Viable Salmonid Population (VSP). It includes:

- An assessment of historic and current habitat and fish population conditions;
- A comparison of historic and current conditions;
- An assessment of fish use and limiting factors;
- An evaluation of functional linkages; and
- The necessary future conditions to support a VSP.

This information is provided in our Strategic Assessment report (http://dnr.metrokc.gov/Wrias/9/StratAssess.htm). Necessary future conditions include the abundance, productivity, growth rate, and spatial structure needed for a VSP. The Strategic Assessment will be used to filter through the universe of potential actions to determine the portfolio of management actions that we should take for a VSP.[*]

Mary Ruckelshaus and Bob Fuerstenberg, the Technical Review Team liaisons to WRIA 9, met with the WRIA 9 Technical Committee on January 22, 2004, to review our work plan and schedule. Mary and Bob agreed to provide a technical review of our Strategic Assessment products when completed.

Pursuant to guidance from Margaret Duncan and Jagoda Perich-Anderson, Watershed Liaison and Associate Director of Shared Salmon Strategy, respectively, the final versions of the Strategic Assessment products are available on the WRIA 9 Strategic Assessment web site (http://dnr.metrokc.gov/Wrias/9/StratAssess.htm). In addition, there are several draft versions of Strategic Assessment products that will have limited (password-protected) access as of June 30, 2004. We will provide separate instructions to Margaret and Jagoda on how to access these draft documents. When finalized, these latter documents will be added to the Strategic Assessment web page listed above.

On the web is our overall strategy for salmon recovery planning that was voluntarily initiated in 1998 (http://dnr.metrokc.gov/Wrias/9/WRIA9StrategyTimeline.pdf). Please note that we set out to produce four products:

- Limiting factors and reconnaissance assessment (completed December 2000);
- Strategic assessment (completed June 2004);
- Near-term action agenda (completed May 2002); and

[*] All documents referenced in this text can be found at the WRIA 9 website: http://dnr.metrokc.gov/Wrias/9/participant.html. For convenience, specific URLs are provided for most documents.

- Habitat plan (forthcoming).

As you can see, our overall planning strategy emphasizes a thorough and deep scientific assessment that sets a solid foundation for our forthcoming habitat plan. At the same time, we have undertaken to complete protection and restoration projects on-the-ground where current science clearly justifies action.

Chinook salmon populations that were historically present in the Duwamish basin (when the Green, White, Cedar, and Black Rivers all were part of the watershed) included:
- North Lake Washington summer/fall stock;
- Cedar River summer/fall stock;
- Green River spring stock;
- Green River summer/fall stock; and
- White River spring stock.

The population that is currently present is the Green River summer/fall stock.

b. What is the watershed vision for salmon recovery and other interests and needs in the watershed? How do you envision balancing and complementing the various needs and the interests of your watershed?

WRIA 9 planning seeks to contribute to salmon recovery through habitat improvements and meet community interests. The habitat plan approach, summarizing the ecosystem approach being followed in developing the long-term salmon habitat plan, is at our website (http://dnr.metrokc.gov/Wrias/9/PlanApproach.doc). Also included are *draft* plan goals (http://dnr.metrokc.gov/Wrias/9/PlanGoalsdraft.doc). We would appreciate review of these documents.

It is important to note that the current physical characteristics of WRIA 9 have been affected by a legacy of development and human activity. It is a working watershed, yet it is not without currently functioning habitat, an ever-increasing corridor of open space along the river, and the potential to provide salmon sanctuaries that will also benefit other species. These considerations shape our vision and the steps we are developing to realize it.

Consequently, the vision of WRIA 9 is to develop and implement, through the cooperation of citizens, business, Tribes and government, a watershed salmon habitat plan based on our best understanding of salmon biology that will allow both the salmon and people to prosper.

One step toward achieving our vision is the Near-Term Action Agenda for Salmon Habitat Conservation completed in May 2002 (http://dnr.metrokc.gov/Wrias/9/NTAA.htm). It informs and guides our short-term actions that focus on salmon habitat conservation by identifying 45 priority actions that are doable in 2-4 years while the Habitat Plan is completed. It seeks to balance funding, community interests, and science. All recommendations are certain to benefit salmon. The Near-Term Action Agenda provides guidance or – expressed another way – lists the actions that we think are advisable to do (and, for some actions, specificity on where to do them) for salmon habitat conservation in our watershed while we work to complete the long-term salmon habitat plan. Two annual progress reports summarizing implementation of the recommendations of the Near-Term Action Agenda are available on line (http://dnr.metrokc.gov/Wrias/9/NTAA-progress-report-2003.pdf and http://dnr.metrokc.gov/Wrias/9/NTAA-progress-report-2002.pdf). In addition, a matrix that lists a selection of the on-the-ground actions that are being or are close to being implemented is available on line (http://dnr.metrokc.gov/Wrias/9/WRIA9-ontheground-actions2004.pdf).

The current WRIA 9 salmon conservation and recovery technical strategy outlines three technical goals to guide our actions while the Strategic Assessment and Habitat Plan are being completed. They are:

- **Protect currently functioning habitat and habitat forming processes from degradation, primarily in the Middle Green River subwatershed and the nearshore areas of Vashon/Maury Islands.** This will help maintain and support the abundance and productivity of salmonid populations.

- **Connect the Upper Green River subwatershed by restoring access for salmonids to facilitate efficient and safe passage for adults and juveniles above and below the dams.** This will increase the spatial distribution of salmonids and contribute to increased diversity and abundance.

- **Restore/Enhance habitat that contributes to adequate juvenile salmonid survival.** This will be the primary approach in the Lower Green River, Duwamish River and Nearshore subwatersheds to increase productivity and contribute to increased life history diversity.

On the web is the complete document that provides more information, the Working Paper of the WRIA 9 Technical Committee: Technical Strategy for Multi-Species Salmonid Conservation, and Recovery in the Green/Duwamish and Central Puget Sound Watersheds, June 2003 (http://dnr.metrokc.gov/Wrias/9/WRIA9-Technical-Strategy-June-2003.pdf). The technical underpinning for the technical strategy is the Habitat Limiting Factors and Reconnaissance Assessment Report, December 2000 (http://dnr.metrokc.gov/Wrias/9/Recon.htm?id=8). The Working Paper was updated in 2003 to incorporate new information gathered since 2000.

An *updated* technical strategy, based on the recent findings of the Strategic Assessment, is nearly complete and WRIA 9 committees will review it in July. Although we are not able to provide a copy of the updated strategy as of June 30, 2004, we request that you review the updated strategy rather than the June 2003 version described in the previous paragraph. It will be a better use of your time and of greater assistance to us to review this new, third iteration of our technical strategy. Please contact us in August if your review schedule permits this so that we can provide you a copy at that time.

The technical strategy working paper, as mentioned above, has been guiding our recent management actions while we complete the Strategic Assessment and Habitat Plan. For these two final products of our planning strategy, we are using elements of the Guidance of the Puget Sound Technical Recovery Team and Shared Strategy and the State of Washington Salmon Recovery Model to guide our habitat planning process and, ultimately, selection of management actions. The steps we are/will use to balance and complement the needs and interests in the watershed are:

- A Strategic Assessment that provides the scientific information and foundation of the plan;
- Development of technically-based habitat management strategies (both WRIA-wide and by subwatershed [subwatershed boundaries shown at: http://dnr.metrokc.gov/Wrias/9/local_action_map.htm]);
- Analysis/policy synthesis;
- Development of alternatives; and
- Selection of priority actions.

We are also implementing an extensive public outreach and education program to disseminate information and obtain community input on the Habitat Plan and its management actions (balancing and complementing the various needs and the interests of the watershed).

These scientific and planning steps are expected to be substantially complete by the end of 2004 and the draft long-term salmon habitat plan will be published in May 2005 (please refer to the planning strategy: http://dnr.metrokc.gov/Wrias/9/WRIA9StrategyTimeline.pdf), following extensive public involvement.

c. What are your measurable salmon recovery goals and the timeframe to achieve them? What has already been accomplished toward achieving them?

The necessary future conditions will provide measurable goals for both fish populations and habitat to support a VSP over the long term. The Puget Sound Technical Recovery Team has defined this as roughly 100 years. The monitoring provisions that are part of the long-term salmon habitat plan will provide specific, measurable objectives for the 5-10 year time frame. Adaptive management and monitoring plans will be completed by May 2005 as part of the draft habitat plan.

The WRIA 9 Lead Entity has secured numerous grants and is translating these into on-the-ground protection and restoration of salmon habitat. These grants include $5.7 million from the State Salmon Recovery Funding Board, to make major advances in protecting and restoring spawning and rearing habitat and to assess nearshore and estuarine habitat. A map of the habitat projects funded through 2003 by the Recovery Board is at our website, along with a matrix of the funded projects (http://dnr.metrokc.gov/Wrias/9/SRFBprojects.htm). The King Conservation District is another key source of habitat project and program funding. About $2.62 million of funding from the District has gone to projects that support development of the Strategic Assessment, planning documents, habitat projects, stewardship, and education. A map of the King Conservation District funded habitat projects and programs can be downloaded from the website (http://dnr.metrokc.gov/Wrias/9/KCD_project_map.jpg). In addition, the website has a spreadsheet that lists projects funded by the District since 1998 (http://dnr.metrokc.gov/Wrias/9/KCDFundedGrants1998-2003.xls). WRIA 9 recently obtained federal construction authority to begin implementing a $113 million, 45 habitat projects program through a partnership with the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers. A map of these Green/Duwamish Ecosystem Restoration Project locations can also be downloaded from the website (http://dnr.metrokc.gov/Wrias/9/0402w9ERhandout1.pdf). Finally, see the matrix referenced above that lists many of the on-the-ground actions that are being or are close to being implemented (http://dnr.metrokc.gov/Wrias/9/WRIA9-ontheground-actions2004.pdf).

d. What on-the-ground actions can be accomplished in the next 5 to 10 years and what will be the result for populations and habitat functions (i.e., actions to turn the negative trend around)? What are the next steps to advance other changes that cannot be addressed in the shorter timeframe?

The long-term salmon habitat plan will provide actions that can be accomplished in the next 5-10 years. Other changes will be addressed by potential actions in the 20 year and 50+ year time frames. The plan will also contain monitoring and adaptive management elements that provide a framework for possible additional actions or for staying the course. Funding for implementing actions and governance structures are under discussion at this time, both locally and regionally.

Many on-the-ground habitat projects that are listed in the matrix listed above (http://dnr.metrokc.gov/Wrias/9/WRIA9-ontheground-actions2004.pdf) and those projects that are part of the Green/Duwamish Ecosystem Restoration Project (http://dnr.metrokc.gov/Wrias/9/0402w9ERhandout1.pdf) will be accomplished in the next 5-10 years.

In addition to actions on-the-ground and acquisitions, WRIA 9 will include programmatic, regulatory and incentive-based actions in its Habitat Plan. The plan will include public education and outreach activities designed to encourage changes in human behavior and foster stewardship. Salmon habitat planning is technically complex in spatial and temporal terms. To ensure that actions are effective over time, the plan will include adaptive management and monitoring elements.

e. What are the preliminary estimates for cost of actions (i.e., projects, acquisition, regulations, incentives, etc.) and on-going operations in the next 5-10 years?

The long-term salmon habitat plan will lay out costs of actions in three time frames: 5 to 10 years; 20 years; and 50 years and beyond. We will use the cost estimation primer provided by Shared Strategy and other considerations (other financial information and experience) to determine the costs of needed actions over 5 to 10 years. We are using an ecological economics approach to evaluate the longer term implications of habitat plan actions including the value of ecosystem services. Implementation of the Green/Duwamish Ecosystem Restoration Project alone is estimated to cost $113 million.

f. What commitments (policy level decisions, funding, etc.) will be necessary for implementation and what conditions need to be in place for the commitments to be made? Statements of commitment are expected from local decision-makers by June 2005. These can be in the form of resolutions to pursue the broader, long-term goal of sustainable, harvestable runs (e.g. "We want salmon here and commit to search for creative solutions to achieve recovery goals.") or in more specific form. For the 5 – 10 year timeframe, the Development Committee will look for statements that describe specific actions, projects and funding (e.g. projects as part of capital improvement plans; habitat protection/restoration as part of growth management).

The WRIA 9 Watershed Forum (coalition of local governments within the Green/Duwamish and Central Puget Sound Watershed: http://dnr.metrokc.gov/Wrias/9/ForumMembership.htm) is committed to understanding what is necessary to achieve a VSP over the long term, including the short-terms actions that will set us on that course.

Pursuant to an existing Interlocal Agreement, the WRIA 9 Steering Committee (http://dnr.metrokc.gov/Wrias/9/SteerComMem.htm) is empowered to oversee the development of a long-term salmon habitat plan and recommend the plan to the Watershed Forum in May 2005.

It is anticipated that local governments will play an important role in implementing the plan. Jurisdictions will be asked to ratify the plan after Forum approval, thereby increasing implementation certainty. In addition to these local commitments, implementation certainty would be increased with federal assurances and funding. Implementation of adaptive management and monitoring plans could also be supported with federal funding which would help ensure that recovery efforts are on track.